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Volunteers to count Richland bicyclists, pedestrians as part of statewide survey

By Pratik Joshi, Herald staff writer

John Ittner plans to spend a few hours counting bicyclists and pedestrians in Richland next week.

He is one of about 200 volunteers helping to collect data statewide from Tuesday through Thursday for improved transportation planning.

"(It) will help us more accurately measure demand, benefits of existing paths and trails and help us identify new needs," said Paula Hammond, state transportation secretary.

DOT is working with the Cascade Bicycle Club and other groups that support biking and walking on a nationwide survey that'll eventually help get more people out of their cars for travel.

Volunteers will be assigned to six sites in 17 communities including Wenatchee, Yakima, Walla Walla and Spokane for the count. The information will be used to set benchmarks to track progress of biking and walking in the state over the years, said David Hiller, advocacy director for Cascade Bicycle Club in Seattle.

The goal is to increase the number of "nonmotorized" trips from 10 percent to 20 percent of all trips by 2020 and promote road safety, he said.

The recently completed State Bicycle Facilities and Pedestrian Walkways Plan aims to decrease collisions by 5 percent per year for the next 20 years.

Ittner, a member and treasurer of Tri-City Bicycle Club, though excited about the project, said the exclusion of Kennewick, Pasco and West Richland in the count may skew the results.

The number of bikers has gone up considerably in the Tri-Cities, he said. Until a few years ago, he knew almost every bicyclist in town, but now he finds a lot of people biking around that he doesn't know, Ittner said.

Hiller said the survey cities were selected on the basis of population, geographic distribution and available resources. Expanding the program would have required more volunteers and organizers had only about three weeks to prepare for the survey, he said. He thinks the survey will include more cities in the future.

Bicycle commuting in Washington has increased 75 percent in the last 10 years, according to the State Bicycle Facilities and Pedestrian Walkways Plan. But there's potential for growth.

The plan says more than 50 percent of all trips in the state are under three miles, yet 80 percent of them are made by car.

Such short trips are hard on the car and add to traffic congestion, Ittner said. Biking and walking, instead of using the car, can help people stay in shape and reduce carbon emissions, he said.

Survey hours are from 7 to 9 a.m. and 4 to 6 p.m. on all the three days. To volunteer, contact David Hiller at 206-522-9479 or 206-218-6712 or [david.hiller@ cascadebicycleclub.org](mailto:david.hiller@cascadebicycleclub.org)

To learn more about the survey, visit www.wsdot.wa.gov/bike/bike_counts.htm and to learn more about the state bike and walk plan, go to www.wsdot.wa.gov/BIKE/PDF/BikePedPlan.pdf.